

Lost Generation

In the aftermath of the war there arose a group of young persons known as the "Lost Generation." The term was coined from something Gertrude Stein witnessed the owner of a garage saying to his young employee, which Hemingway later used as an epigraph to his novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926): "You are all a lost generation." This accusation referred to the lack of purpose or drive resulting from the horrific disillusionment felt by those who grew up and lived through the war, and were then in their twenties and thirties. Having seen pointless death on such a huge scale, many lost faith in traditional values like courage, patriotism, and masculinity. Some in turn became aimless, reckless, and focused on material wealth, unable to believe in abstract ideals.

The Great War, which took place between 1914-1918, shook the very foundations of the Western world, causing a societal upheaval that left immediate and lasting impressions on every aspect of society and culture. Great Britain, as one of the primary belligerents of the conflict, was no exception; and experienced a wave of social and artistic change as a direct result of the war. One of the most heavily impacted cultural arenas to be touched by the war was literature. Literature during the Great War often reflects upon and bitinglly criticizes the horrors of war, as well as the changes society was undergoing and provides a drastic transition between pre and post war work. Many social, political, and economic shifts occurred during the war, and any of the writers of the time felt the need to speak out against the flaws they saw in their society, sometimes even while fighting for their lives in the trenches. The new style of war allowed soldiers an unprecedented amount of time to ponder the battles which they fought; not only in the literal sense, but battles of the mind and spirit which were of no shortage in the hellish conditions that they endured. Literature became a common way for the British soldiers to approach the reality of the war, whether to express dissent against it, or to simply understand it.

Women and men alike turned to writing as a means of emotional outlet. Back in Britain, the social order was being rocked by the war taking place across the channel, with women becoming key economic supporters in the absence of men and men suffering the physical and psychological stress of war. Women were forced to adopt a role that was traditionally considered masculine, taking on industrial work in factories in order to provide for their children, as well as assuming a leading role in the maintenance of the family. As a result

many women began to speak out, discussing their view on the war and the impact it was placing on their families. Writers and poets of the Great War attempted to distinguish how this war was different than anything the world had seen before, both the manner in which it was fought and the changing attitude toward the purpose of the conflict, and it was a task shared by all of society, both those on the battlefield and back at home

Lost Generation, a group of American writers who came of age during World War I and established their literary reputations in the 1920s. The term is also used more generally to refer to the post-World War I generation.

The generation was “lost” in the sense that its inherited values were no longer relevant in the postwar world and because of its spiritual alienation from a United States that, basking under Pres. Warren G. Harding’s “back to normalcy” policy, seemed to its members to be hopelessly provincial, materialistic, and emotionally barren. The term embraces Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, E.E. Cummings, Archibald MacLeish, Hart Crane, and many other writers who made Paris the centre of their literary activities in the 1920s.

Common themes in works of literature by members of the Lost Generation include:

Moral decadence and meaninglessness in the postwar era:

Consider the lavish parties of James Gatsby in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* or those thrown by the characters in his *Tales of the Jazz Age*. Recall the aimless traveling, drinking, and parties of the circles of expatriates in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Moveable Feast*. With ideals shattered so thoroughly by the war, for many, hedonism was the result. Lost Generation writers revealed the sordid nature of the shallow, frivolous lives of the young and independently wealthy in the aftermath of the war.

Gender roles and Impotence as a result of the Great War

Faced with the destruction of the chivalric notions of warfare as a glamorous calling for a young man, a serious blow was dealt to traditional gender roles and images of masculinity. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the narrator, Jake, literally is impotent as a result of a war wound, and instead it is his female love Brett who acts the man, manipulating sexual partners and taking

charge of their lives. Think also of T. S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and Prufrock's inability to declare his love to the unnamed recipient.

Idealizing the past and old memories

Rather than face the horrors of warfare, many worked to create an idealised but unattainable image of the past, a glossy image with no bearing in reality. The best example is in *Gatsby's* idealisation of Daisy, his inability to see her as she truly is, and the closing lines to the novel after all its death and disappointment.

Alienation and loss

Alienation is a major theme of human condition in the contemporary period. It has a profound impact upon the modernist literature and twentieth century writers. Alienation appears as natural consequence of WWI and WWII. The theme of alienation has been variously dealt with persistently and unflinchingly in modern literature.